ESCAPE TO GLORY (Columbia, 1941) Directed by John Brahm; produced by Samuel Bischoff. Screenplay by P.j. Wolfson from a story by Sidney S Baldwin and Frederick Frank. Camera, Franz Planer; produced and initially reviewed under the title "Submarine Zone"; 74 mins.


Actually produced in 1940, and not released until April of 1941, "Escape to Glory" is rather typical of Hollywood's World War 2. There was a tendency to regard the War (in which it was then assumed America would never become involved) as a topical and colorful new background to which standard fightings could be adapted. There was some resentment, especially in Europe, of Hollywood's apparently quick-back exploitation of the war, and its reduction of that massive tragedy into a mere convenient backdrop. But there wasn't a great deal one could do; America was still officially neutral, and early attempts to make a political statement in film, or to use them to take sides, had been frowned on and in certain cases - as with MGM's "The Mortal Storm" - had even been involved in governmental criticism and investigation.

Hollywood was smart enough to realize that its European market was virtually shot, and was not trying to hang on to it by avoiding offending the Axis powers. Moreover, many of the studio heads were Jewish and wanted to take a stand against Nazism and what it stood for. As the war progressed and American sympathies became more firmly entwined with the Allies, Hollywood did indeed begin to take sides, neutrality act or not, and of course with Pearl Harbor, all restraints were removed.

"Escape to Glory" is an "Outward Bound" kind of story in which the war is really little more than a catalyst, and provides a dramatic solution. It has cliched construction and characters, and would have been a 28 at Warners or Metro. At Columbia it was what was often termed a "Nervous 4", but did good business on a small part of the bill by virtue of the polished, "everyman" quality of the title "Submarine Zone" was used in many situations to assure that it was a war film. In New York it opened at the Globe Theatre (now torn down) in Times Square, following a long and successful run of Carol Reed's "Night Train to Munich". Propagandist themes were facilely extended via individual characters rather than by blatant speeches; e.g., the apparently "good" German quickly renotypes to type and becomes a Han, while Alan Baxter was probably the first of the wartime gangsters to turn patriot, a route soon to be followed by Humphrey Bogart and Alan Ladd. "Escape to Glory" isn't a particularly notable film, and certainly wasn't so regarded at the time; but it's a serviceable little melodrama, and interesting today not only as a reflection of Hollywood's initial kid-glove handling of the war, but for other things as well. Not least, stylistically, it's early film noir, and John Brahm (who earlier had made the interesting "Let Us Live", a virtual parallel to Lang's "On One Live Once") was to become one of the foremost film noir directors of the 40's. The Production Code influence is well in evidence too, especially in the role allotted to John Halliday - the same kind of role he'd always specialized in, but in earlier days endowing them with a kind of elegant gallantry, and here forced to be a pure rat. Constance Bennett, somewhat past her prime now as a major boxoffice personality (and her role and appearance here make interesting contrast with her 1925 silent "Married?", shown last week), has her mistress role not so much whitewashed as made very non-explicit. The dialogue too, lacks the punch, wit and viciousness that such a tale would have had a few years earlier, though there's an occasional echo of it, such as Pat O'Brien's remark to Bennett that she's a five-alarm fire, her time being up. John Halliday, a Max Ophuls favorite cinematographers, was one of many European film-making refugees who came to work in Hollywood during the war years, although shortly after this he would change his first name to Frank to play down his European (and thus possibly German) ancestry. Certainly an entertaining film, it nevertheless must be considered more interesting for all those diverse components than for its quality as a whole.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

NONE SHALL ESCAPE (Columbia, 1944) Directed by Andre de Toth; produced by Samuel Bischoff; Associate Producer; Burt Kelly; Camera, Lee Garmes; Screenplay by Lester Cole from a story by Alfred Newman and Joseph Thon, Music, Ernest Toch; 85 mins.


A number of films during the war told their stories in flashbacks, from a victorious post-war viewpoint, a useful morale-building play. By 1944 however, victory was in sight - though further away than many imagined, and a few films took up other themes in preparation for peace. One theme, typified best by The Seventh Cross, was to warn against revenge by reminding us that there would be no good revenge against exacting enemies. For if not revenge, then certainly retribution. Few people really thought much about the situation that evolved into the Nuremberg trials; it was assumed that the major Nazis would either be killed in the invasion or would take their own lives, and that the "small fry" weren't of much importance. "None Shall Escape" thus has considerable novelty value and was quite thought-provoking, though it was sold on sensationalist lines and on the prestige value of Alexander Knox, who had not, it was felt, done much more than fluff up small-time flummery. He did much of this in the book, and is particularly interesting today for all the talent involved behind the camera - de Toth, Garmes, Toch and Lester Cole - men whose work is better known and appreciated than it was in the 40's. Cole of course was one of the victims of the Communist investigations; although there's little doubt that he did indeed slip some pretty insidious - and effective - propaganda into some of his scripts.

Program ends: 10:30 Discussion follows.

William D. Eweron ---